# BOARD TRANSMITTAL MEMORANDUM

## PLACER COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

TO:

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS** 

FROM:

PLANNING DEPARTMENT 54.

SUBJECT:

Placer County Conservation Plan - Early Acquisition Priorities

DATE:

November 30, 2004

SUMMARY/ACTION REQUESTED: At the request of Supervisor Weygandt it is requested that the Board of Supervisors provide direction to pursue State and Federal funding opportunities to assist with land acquisitions required to support the Placer County Conservation Plan (PCCP) and to assist in the implementation of the Placer Legacy Open Space and Agricultural Conservation Program (Placer Legacy).

BACKGROUND: In June 2000, the Board directed staff to initiate the implementation of the Placer Legacy Program. One of the objectives of the program was to prepare a Natural Community Conservation Plan and Habitat Conservation Plan, now known as the Placer County Conservation Plan (PCCP). Staff has been working on this effort with various stakeholder working groups since October of 2001 and has now moved into the preparation of the actual draft conservation plan. A significant component of both the conservation plan and the Placer Legacy Program is identifying funding sources to support future land acquisitions. The preparation of an acquisition plan will assist the County in pursuing State and Federal funding opportunities.

FISCAL IMPACT: The preparation of an acquisition plan and the identification of funding sources do not have any direct fiscal impacts, with the exception of staff time and resources spent pursuing such funding sources. Once new funding sources are identified and any required matching obligations of such programs determined, staff will be able to evaluate the fiscal impacts associated with accepting an award of these funds. Staff will report back to the Board prior to signing any contracts and accepting any funds.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors provide the following direction:

- Authorize staff to negotiate with the resource agencies on the identification of funding sources to assist in the implementation of an acquisition plan for Placer Legacy and Placer County Conservation Plan acquisitions.
- Direct staff to return to the Board for authorization to proceed in the event that funding sources and conservation lands are identified.

#### **MEMORANDUM**

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DISCUSSION: Through the preparation of the draft conservation plan, Planning Department staff, with assistance from resource agencies, have analyzed the natural resources occurring in the Phase 1 area (western Placer County) on a landscape level and have identified a strategy for establishing ecological reserves within the planning area. Identifying a design for reserve establishment is a critical component of the conservation plan because the resources managed within these areas must be viable and sufficient in size to offset the impact to these resources that result from development activities occurring elsewhere in western Placer County.

To aid the reserve design analysis, the Phase 1 landscape has been divided into eight Conservation Management Units (CMUs) (see Exhibit 1, Figure 1). Objectives for reserve establishment have been developed for each of these CMU areas (see Exhibit 1). As staff has indicated in previous discussions with the Board, the County will be required to establish upwards of approximately 50,000 acres in permanent reserves to meet PCCP conservation objectives. Approximately 60-70% of these lands will be fee title purchases and the

remaining obligation will be protected through the establishment of agricultural and open space conservation easements.

The acquisition of the reserve lands will be funded in part through development mitigation and fees associated with impacts to individual natural resources. However, the County does have an obligation through the PCCP and in the implementation of the Placer Legacy Program to assist in the conservation of natural communities in the Phase 1 area above and beyond offsetting development impacts to the natural communities.

Outside funding sources must be identified if the County is to achieve these open space objectives. There are a number of State and Federal funding sources dedicated to conserving open space and natural communities. Planning Department staff would like to prepare an acquisition plan in order to pursue funding programs available from the resource agencies to determine if funds can be made available for land acquisitions in the Phase 1 area.

FISCAL IMPACT: The preparation of an acquisition plan and the identification of funding sources do not have any direct fiscal impacts, with the exception of staff time and resources spent pursuing such funding sources. Once new funding sources are identified and any required matching obligations of such programs determined, staff will be able to evaluate the fiscal impacts associated with accepting an award of these funds. Typically funding "match" obligations range from 0 to 25% of the acquisition costs. Should any acquisitions result in County ownership, maintenance and/or monitoring costs could fall to the County as previously reported to the Board of Supervisors. This is also unknown at this time, as the state or non-profit groups may also end up acquiring such lands. Staff will report back to the Board prior to signing any contracts and accepting any funds.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** It is respectfully recommended that the Board of Supervisors provide the following direction:

- Authorize staff to negotiate with the resource agencies on the identification of funding sources to assist in the implementation of an acquisition plan for Placer Legacy and Placer County Conservation Plan acquisitions.
- Direct staff to return to the Board for authorization to proceed in the event that funding sources and conservation lands are identified.

Respectfully Submitted,

Planning Director

**EXHIBIT:** The following exhibit is provided for the Board' reference:

Exhibit 1 - Placer County Conservation Plan Phase 1 Reserve System

### Placer County Conservation Plan Phase 1 Reserve System

The PCCP will establish a comprehensive reserve system that will provide for the conservation of all natural communities occurring within the Phase 1 planning area – from small patch ecosystems to extensive acres of grasslands and oak woodlands. The reserve will also provide for the recovery of a broad range of listed and otherwise sensitive species as an integral and required component of the Placer County Conservation Plan (PCCP). The following outlines the reserve design proposed for the PCCP, provides an analysis of early reserve acquisition priorities, and summarizes recommendations for future focus on acquisition.

Reserve Design Summary

The reserve system established for the PCCP will include several large reserves, or Conservation Management Units (CMU), to be managed within the landscape of the Phase 1 planning area. The entire reserve system will total approximately 50,000 acres of land and each CMU will be sufficiently large to provide functional natural communities and the necessary habitat quantity and quality to meet the needs of the covered species. The CMU will be spatially distributed and interconnected across the Phase 1 landscape to provide for the highest degree of certainty that species and habitat conservation will be retained through time. This reserve system design will allow for internal connectivity between CMUs as well as east/west connectivity along the Coon Creek, Doty Ravine and Bear River watersheds. This linkage will additionally provide for connectivity with Phase 2 of the Placer County PCCP and, most likely, with the ongoing conservation strategies within the Yuba Sutter NCCP/HCP to the west of Placer County Phase 1 planning area.

Eight CMUs have been identified in the Phase 1 planning area (see Figure 1). The CMUs were selected based upon a number of features including watershed boundaries, the uniformity of the landscape, interconnectedness between key resource areas within the boundary, the relationship to land uses within the boundary or adjacent to the boundary, potential changes in land use over time adjacent to the boundary and the conservation needs (including species recovery needs) for each area. The eight CMUs are described as follows:

- 1. Lower Auburn
- 2. Markham
- 3. Lower Coon
- 4. Yankee Slough
- 5. Garden Bar
- Dry Creek (stream system only)
- 7. Upper Auburn (stream system only)
- 8. Upper Doty (stream system only)

Information on CMU acreage and the general land cover types occurring within each CMU is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Acres in Each CMU Area by Land Cover Type

CMU Area			Acres by	Land Cov	or Tune		
	Annual Grassland	Vernal Pool Complex	Agriculture	Woodland	Aquatic/ Wetland/	Urban	Total
1. Lower	8,329	8,438	16,288	+	Riparian	_1	- 1
Auburn		-,	10,200	89	675	1,265	35,084
2. Markham	2,244	2,777	9,464	-		' ' '	7 50,00
3. Lower Coon	2,935	694	4,117	69	478	367	15,399
4. Yankee	8,840	2,221	4,323	85	371	221	8,423
Slough	1	-, ·	4,323	1,852	1,353	656	19,245
5. Garden Bar	6,431	2	1.000			1	13,243
. Dry Creek <sup>1</sup>	269	2	1,096	19,760	1,185	2,476	30,950
. Upper	308	0	75	438	577	1,652	
uburn¹		•	128	402	615	406	3,013
. Upper Doty¹	365	<u> </u>			_	700	1,859
easured 500 feet	from centerline	of stream	90	420	220	174	1.269

The formation of each CMU within the reserve system will be difficult. Especially difficult but necessary will be the acquisition of land that will allow for connectivity between CMUs. A timeline, consistent with development in the Phase 1 area, is proposed as

Table 2 **Acquisitions Objectives Over Time** 

Reserve Area	Acquisition Ob Total Acres Acquired	ectives	in 10 ve	ar Incre	manta	
	and Miles of Stream Restored	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
1. Lower Auburn	12,500 acres 4 miles	2,000	4,000	8,000	10,000	12,500
2. Markham	7,500 acres 1 miles	1,500	3,000	6,000	7,000	7,500
3. Lower Coon	5,000 acres 2 miles	1,000	2,000	3,000	4,000	5,000
4. Yankee Slough	10,000 acres 3 miles	2,500	3,500	5,000	7,000	
5. Garden Bar	15,000 acres	3,000	5,000	8,000	12,500	10,000
. Dry Creek . Upper Auburn	4 miles 2 miles	0.25	1.0	1.75		15,000
. Upper Doty	2 miles 2 miles	0.25	0.5	1.0	2.0 2.0	2.0
		0.20	1.0	1.5	2.0	2.0

### Lower Auburn, Lower Coon, Yankee Slough and Markham

The objective for the four CMUs in the valley (Lower Auburn, Lower Coon, Yankee Slough and Markham) are for those covered species and natural communities that require large areas of habitat unhindered by the indirect impacts of urban development including vernal pool invertebrates, vernal pool plants, and raptors. The CMUs will be large enough and contiguous to allow for any management strategy that may be required to assure that the covered species and natural communities can be retained

and remain intact through time. Each of these four CMUs will have at least one habitat block totaling 2,500 acres. The focus within these reserves systems will be on the acquisition and management of existing vernal pool complexes, grasslands and riparian systems. Management will include working ranches and farms. Restoration of existing grasslands to vernal pool grassland systems will be a critical feature of these four reserve areas. Conversion of rice to vernal pool grassland will be considered only where rice occurs within a reserve system and only when the site, based on historical photo interpretation, supported vernal pool grasslands. Preference shall be given to restoring vernal pool landscapes in areas shown to contain pools in the past but the hydrology or some other condition has caused a diminishment in vernal pool presence or density. Consensus would need to be reached among all parties that the conversion would be within the best interests of meeting the reserve system objectives. Active agriculture, such as alfalfa or irrigated pasture, will also be considered as an important component of the operation and management strategy.

The development of a grassland/wetland/agricultural reserve within CMUs 2 and 3 (Markham and Lower Coon) will be a critical feature of the comprehensive PCCP reserve system. This complex will provide permanent and seasonal wetland, open water within active rice fields, and grassland habitats for the substantial winter waterfowl populations inhabiting western Placer County and will also provide refuges for the numerous avian species that rely on these habitats in western Placer County as stopover foraging areas during their fall/spring migrations. This reserve complex will span a minimum of 2,500 acres in CMUs 2 and 3 and would be planned in connection with Sutter County and the Habitat Joint Venture, which has a goal of establishing a large 5,000-acre reserve in the region. Collectively, these reserves could total 5-10,000 acres of contiguous open water/wetland habitat in the region. The incorporation of active agricultural lands also helps the County meet other conservation goals such as those expressed in the Placer Legacy Open Space and Agricultural Conservation Program.

Garden Bar and Yankee Slough

The objective for the oak woodland CMUs along the Bear and Coon Creek areas (CMU 5 - Garden Bar and, again, CMU 4 - Yankee Slough) is that of oak woodland and riparian habitat conservation and the recovery of covered species associated with these habitats, such as salmonids and oak woodland raptors. The Garden Bar and Yankee Slough CMUs span the majority of the oak woodland in the Spenceville Conceptual Area Protection Plan (CAPP) that has been prepared for Placer and Yuba Counties by the Department of Fish and Game. Approximately 1,600 acres of habitat have been preserved to date within these CMU boundaries. These CMU systems will provide a critical east/west link to the Phase 2 area and, along with the CMUs in the valley, to the conservation system in Yuba and Sutter counties (e.g. Spenceville Wildlife Area and potential reserve areas resulting from the Yuba/Sutter NCCP). Management will include working ranches and farms and will be focused on but not limited to grazing strategies compatible with the species and habitats within the area. This reserve area will be a minimum of 10,000 acres.

Dry Creek, Upper Auburn Ravine and Upper Doty

Due to existing urban and rural residential development surrounding the Dry Creek, Upper Auburn Ravine, and Upper Doty CMUs the establishment of large contiguous reserves would be a challenge. Parcels larger than 20 acres are rare along these watersheds and land costs, particularly along the Dry Creek corridor, are higher per acre than those found in the other CMU areas. Notwithstanding the degree to which these areas are fragmented from roads and development, these watersheds provide habitat for, or with restoration have the potential to support, spawning and rearing habitat for

listed salmonid species. Thus, conservation within these CMUs will be focused on establishing setbacks from the stream systems, riparian conservation and restoration, water quality and temperature, and connectivity issues related to riparian and stream dependent resources, principally salmonids.

### Early Acquisition Priorities

Through 2010, an estimated 10,000 acres of currently undisturbed natural communities will be impacted as a result of PCCP covered activities. In general these disturbance activities will occur within the Lower Auburn, Markham, and Lower Coon CMUs. The Yankee Slough CMU is not expected to see major urban development projects but will continue to be fragmented by rural residential development at 10 and 20 acre parcel sizes.

The major development projects proposed in these CMUs will be required to offset these impacts through the purchase of mitigation lands containing habitats similar to those disturbed. At least 10,000 acres will likely be incorporated into the CMUs for preservation to meet mitigation requirements, driving major early acquisitions of vernal pool complexes, grasslands, agriculture, and riparian lands within CMUs 1, 2, 3, and 4. Accordingly, the PCCP acquisition plan will not focus heavily on these habitats because the acquisition objectives for these CMUs will predominantly be accomplished through mitigation requirements for development projects.

The preservation of one major habitat type, perennial wetlands, will not be adequately covered through mitigation obligations because this habitat type is not currently widespread throughout the Phase 1 area and will not be greatly impacted by development. Numerous species of waterfowl and other migratory bird species depend on this habitat type for foraging, breeding, and/or shelter. However, because this habitat type is not prevalent in the Phase 1 area, these species currently rely on rice fields for their habitat needs. While rice fields can provide substantial habitat for these species, they do not constitute a permanent habitat source as they can be converted from rice production to some other crop type or remain fallow, depending on the changing needs of the property owner. Because perennial wetlands will not be preserved through project mitigation requirements and because this habitat type does not occur in large areas throughout the Phase 1 boundary, land suitable for perennial wetland restoration will need to be acquired and land supporting rice production will need to be permanently protected in order to adequately provide for the long-term conservation needs of the waterfowl and migratory bird species. Conservation and restoration of perennial wetlands and rice fields will also help conserve the giant garter snake, known to be present in Sutter County to the west.

The Dry Creek, Upper Auburn, and upper Doty CMUs will experience conversion of natural communities to urban uses through 2010 to a much lesser extent than the development occurring in CMUs 1-4. Due to the small parcel size and existing habitat fragmentation in the Dry Creek, Upper Auburn, and Upper Doty CMUs, acquisitions in these areas will not be a priority until after 2010.

While the Garden Bar and, to some extent, the Yankee Slough CMUs likely will not experience rapid urbanization, they will experience a slow but steady parcelization of currently existing large parcels into 5-, 10- and 20-acre parcels. This continual trend of rural residential build-out will result in the fragmentation and conversion of the oak woodlands currently spanning the majority of the Garden Bar CMU and large portions of the Yankee Slough CMU. Some mitigation fees will be collected over time to mitigate for individual tree removal, however, these fees will not accumulate into an amount

sufficient to make larger acquisitions until after 2020 or beyond. At that time, large contiguous parcels may no longer be available, costs will have increased significantly, and the opportunity to conserve this habitat may be lost.

#### Recommendations

Based on this preliminary analysis, the early acquisition priorities should be to acquire those natural communities that will not receive sufficient early protection through PCCP mitigation requirements. Table 3 outlines the early priorities through 2010. The majority of the initial acquisitions should focus on the Yankee Slough, Garden Bar, Markham and Lower Coon CMUs. Acquisition of large, contiguous stands of oak woodlands and securing connectivity throughout the riparian corridors will be the primary focus within the Yankee Slough and Garden Bar CMUs. An early focus on this area with assistance from state/federal funds will provide for the early conservation of these areas while avoiding parcelization and fragmentation of the resource. Conservation in this area also This will insure that the Coon Creek and Bear River watersheds, which have the greatest conservation potential of any 2 watersheds in the Phase 1 area, will see significant levels of protection at the outset of the implementation of the PCCP.

Emphasis should also be placed on the Markham and Lower Coon CMUs by acquiring existing grasslands and conserving rice land through the purchase of conservation easements. The preliminary objective in these CMUs will be the establishment of a perennial wetland complex integrated with active rice farming and grasslands. This landscape level opportunity exists because urbanization has not yet reached this area of the County; however, as urban areas expand west, this opportunity will disappear. An early emphasis on this area will help to achieve this objective.

As State and Federal funding sources become available, these funds should be utilized to fulfill the above-mentioned objectives. To the extent that important opportunities arise and funding exists for grasslands, vernal pool complexes, riparian systems, and agricultural lands, these options should also be considered, as the County has an obligation to conserve all natural communities in the Phase 1 area. Such acquisitions should be considered outside of the CMUs listed as early priorities to the extent that an acquisition would be a critical component of the overall 50-year conservation strategy (e.g., an important corridor for connectivity, buffer area, or addition to an existing conservation property).

Table 3 2010 Acquisition Priorities for Each CMU Area by Community Type

CMU Area	Acres by Natural Community Type						
	Annual Grassland	Vernal Pool Complex	Agriculture	Woodland	Aquatic/ Wetland/ Riparian	Total	
1. Lower Auburn	500	500	1,000	0	0	2,000	
2. Markham	500	500	500	0	10		
3. Lower Coon	200	200	500	0		1,500	
4. Yankee Slough	250	0	0		100	1,000	
5. Garden Bar	500	0	0	2,000	250	2,500	
6. Dry Creek	0	10	<del> </del>	2,000	500	3,000	
7. Upper Auburn	0		0	0	20	20	
	-	0	0	0	20	20	
I. Upper Doty	0	0	10	0	20	20	
Total	1,950	1,200	2,000	4,000	850	10,060	

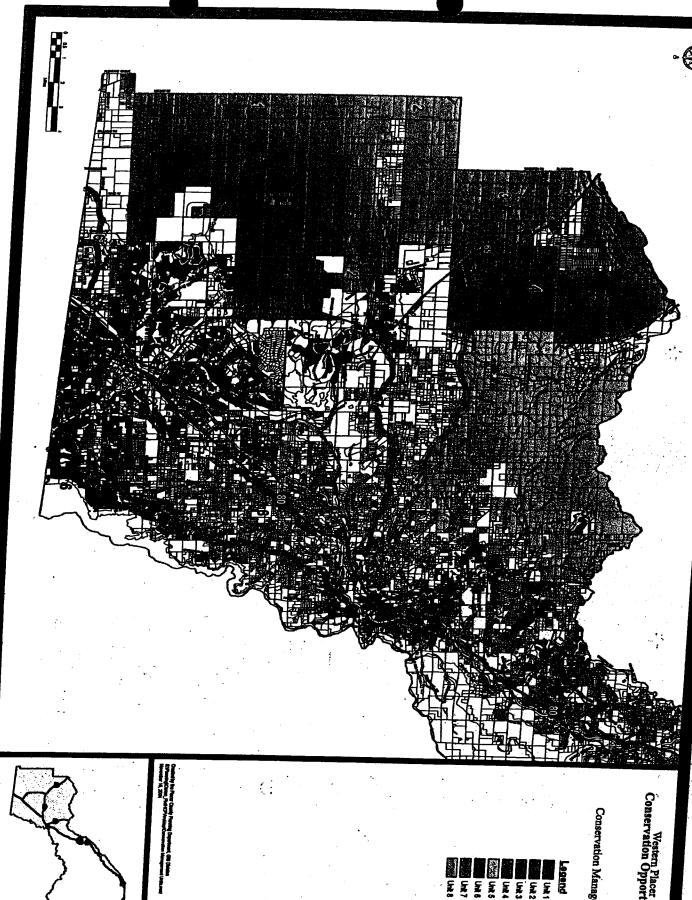




Figure 1